DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 447 436 CS 014 130

TITLE	SuccessMaker.
INSTITUTION	Education Commission of the States, Denver, CO.
PUB DATE	1999-00-00
NOTE	7p.
AVAILABLE FROM	Education Commission of the States, 707 17th St., #2700, Denver, CO 80202-3427. Tel: 303-299-3600; Web site: http://www.ecs.org.
PUB TYPE	Information Analyses (070) -- Reports - Descriptive (141)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	*Computer Assisted Instruction; Elementary Education; *Instructional Effectiveness; Instructional Materials; Preschool Education; *Program Content; Program Descriptions; Reading Improvement; *Reading Instruction; *Reading Programs; Reading Research

ABSTRACT

This paper provides an overview of SuccessMaker, a computer-based reading program that uses literature-based activities to focus on comprehension, vocabulary, phonics, and writing. Intended for use with students in prekindergarten through grade 8, the curriculum challenges students to apply knowledge from literature, content-area reading and interdisciplinary thematic units. SuccessMaker consists of computer-based courses that are designed to complement a classroom reading program with individualized instruction, strategy lessons, and resources and tools for enhancing reading comprehension skills. The main features of SuccessMaker include: standards-based content and instructional design; individualized instruction; continuous progress assessment; authentic literature; resources and tools; flexibility (teachers can customize instruction, and students can work as individuals or partners, focusing on reading skills, writing skills, or higher-order reading and thinking skills); bilingual options (for students learning to read and write in Spanish); parent and community involvement; and customized programs for special populations. SuccessMaker reading programs are currently (1999) being used in more than 16,000 schools nationwide, approximately two-thirds of them elementary schools. Sections of the paper discuss background, philosophy and goals, program components, evidence of effectiveness, professional development and support, implementation, costs, considerations, contact information, and policy issues and questions. (SR)

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SuccessMaker

Background - Philosophy and Goals - Program Components - Evidence of Effectiveness
Professional Development and Support - Implementation - Costs - Considerations
Policy Issues and Questions - Resources

Topic or Category: Reading
Grade Level: PreK-8
Target Population: General, At-Risk, Bilingual, Special Needs, Gifted

OVERVIEW

Background and Scope:

SuccessMaker is a computer-based reading program that uses literature-based activities to focus on comprehension, vocabulary, phonics and writing. The curriculum challenges students to apply knowledge from literature, content -area reading and interdisciplinary thematic units. The courseware provides an integrated approach to the teaching of reading and writing, and can be customized for specific learning needs and teaching preferences. Online tools for portfolio writing are included for all literature-based reading courses.

Computer Curriculum Corporation (CCC), the developer of SuccessMaker, has been designing research-based instructional programs for more than 30 years. The instructional software includes both skills software and literature-based programs that emphasize critical reading skills. SuccessMaker reading programs are currently used in more than 16,000 schools nationwide. Approximately two-thirds of the schools are elementary level.

Philosophy and Goals:

The CCC philosophy is that all students can benefit from curriculum supported by the best in instructional technology. Instruction and assessment go hand-in-hand and teachers are provided with comprehensive reports based on student performance. Program goals include the following:
Accelerate learning to raise achievement in reading for all students
Use multiple means of assessment for monitoring student progress toward achievement
Assist teachers in implementation of best practices
Use data to monitor student progress
Enhance learning for students with diverse learning styles.

Program Components:

SuccessMaker consists of computer-based courses that are designed to complement a classroom reading program with individualized instruction, strategy lessons and resources and tools for enhancing reading comprehension skills. There are model lessons teachers can use for computer presentation to a group and online and offline activities to integrate with classroom instruction. With additional components including extensive goal setting by staff, changes in school governance and more intensive staff development, it can also be used as a schoolwide restructuring program.

The main features of SuccessMaker include the following:
Standards-based Content and Instructional Design: The standards-based content supports the skills, literature and reading-for-information content that are stressed in an academic reading environment.

Individualized Instruction: The reading courseware provides individualized instruction based on each

individual student's performance.

Continuous Progress Assessment: Based on ongoing embedded assessment, the program adjusts to each student's learning level. The teacher is provided with class reports and individual student reports that show the students' progress and areas of current difficulty. The reports provide data that can inform instruction, contribute to individual educational learning plans, assist in overall evaluation and be a communication tool to use with parents.

Authentic Literature: In many courses, authentic literature is used to capitalize on learning to read and reading to learn in contextual settings.

Resources and Tools: Students use graphic organizers, an online notebook and an illustrated glossary in the process of enhancing reading comprehension and response to literature. Student writing is saved in the online portfolio, which is available for teacher review and comment.

Flexibility: Students can work as individuals and as partners, focus on reading skills or higher-order reading and thinking skills, or expand their writing skills. Teachers can customize the instruction based on individual student needs or classroom requirements.

Bilingual Options: ¡Vamos a leer! provides support for the primary student who is learning to read and write in Spanish. Other courses provide Spanish bilingual support as well.

Parent and Community Involvement: Using program software, teachers are able to prepare reports on student progress for parents. Parents and other community members can also volunteer to help students progress through some of the computerized instruction.

Customized Programs for Special Populations: In addition to material for bilingual students, SuccessMaker offers a variety of multimedia materials for students in ESL, at-risk and special education programs.

Evidence of Effectiveness:

Summary of Evidence:
Several independent evaluations, as well as evaluations conducted by school districts, have indicated that students using SuccessMaker programs show moderate to significant gains in reading in both the short term and over extended periods of time.

Discussion of Evidence:
1. In 1996, Metis Associates, Inc. (Metis Associates, 1996 & 1998) independently evaluated SuccessMaker in Community School District Six, located in the Washington Heights and Inwood sections of New York City. A total of 2,501 students were involved in the study, 95% of whom were eligible for free and reduced-priced lunch. Schools were selected to implement the program based on low performance on the 3rd grade reading test. Students were tested using the Degrees of Reading Power (DRP) assessment. No control group was used, since all 3rd graders in the designated schools were targeted for the program. Results from the study included the following:
A higher percentage of students in the program reached or exceeded the State Reference Point than for all district 3rd graders.
Overall, the percentage of students scoring at or above the State Reference Point ranged from 26.3% to 68.5%.
In 1997, all schools but one reached the State Reference Point.

2. In Pamlico County Schools, North Carolina, students in the Fred Anderson Elementary and Pamlico County Middle School implemented Reading Adventures and Reading Investigations [components of SuccessMaker] 20 minutes a day in 1995. Before program implementation, one-third of 3rd through 8th graders performed below grade level on the North Carolina End-of-Grade reading tests.
In an initial five-month pilot study conducted in 1995-96, Title I students using SuccessMaker in 3rd and 4th grade had mean reading gains that exceeded mean gains by non-Title I and all district 4th grade

students.
Since the 1995-96 school year, the number of students at proficiency level is above 75% for all grades except for 6th.
In 1997, the middle school received a School of Distinction award for more than 90% of the students achieving proficiency in reading, math and writing. (Technology Literacy Challenge Grant, 1997, SuccessMaker Evaluation Summaries, 1998).

3. In 1998, L'Anse Creuse Public Schools in Michigan (Brush, 1998) conducted an independent evaluation study to determine the effectiveness of the different SuccessMaker software programs (foundations, exploreware and foundations plus exploreware). The foundations curriculum consisted of more basic, structured activities for students based on traditional reading and math skills. The exploreware curriculum consisted of more open-ended, computer-based activities related to a set of concepts. Fifteen classes (three per grade level), with a total of 1,237 1st through 5th grade students, were randomly assigned to three treatment groups in a control group design. Results from the study showed that students in the exploreware plus foundations reading groups achieved significant gains as measured by pre- and post- Iowa Test of Basic Skills testing after only ten weeks of study. Post-test gains were more pronounced for 1st through 3rd grade students than for 4th and 5th grade students . This study demonstrated the effectiveness of combining a more basic skills curriculum with one the includes broader concepts of a subject as well.

4. In Fort Worth, Texas, in the Title I program, the mean student achievement gains given in normal curve equivalents (NCE) in reading, language arts and math using CCC software and the Stanford Achievement Test have been strong for 10 years, ranging from 8.3 to 13.5 per year (for Title I students, a NCE gain of 2 is considered significant). The average mean NCE gain for reading for the years 1985-1990 was 9.7, the average for language arts was 11.3. As a result of this program, the U.S. Department of Education commended the district for exemplary achievement (Zanotti, 1989-99).

5. In Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, 24 Title I schools demonstrated significant gains in math and reading for six years, 1989-1995, using CCC courseware, with a decrease of 38% in the number of students reading below average, according to the California Achievement Test (Zanotti, 1988-95).

6. In a meta-analysis of 20 evaluation studies, Kulik (1994) reports "students who used this technology-based reading curriculum [Initial Reading and Reader's Workshop, which are part of SuccessMaker] made significantly better scores on standardized testing than students who did not have access to the system." The instruction, individualized to each student's specific learning needs, enabled students to improve their comprehension and vocabulary skills, and significantly increased their reading levels as they moved through the courses. Kulik's meta-analysis found an average effect size of .40.

Professional Development and Support:

CCC requires an initial two-day training for teachers and other staff, such as site coordinators, lab managers, paraprofessionals and volunteer assistants who will be using the SuccessMaker program, plus two days of follow-up training for participants to better understand report analyses and intervention strategies. While not mandated, the developer recommends a total of 10 days of professional development during the first year of program implementation. The developer offers a CD-based training module for smaller programs, but generally the training is conducted onsite by CCC consultants. The program also provides certification courses to train district staff to deliver professional development and other program support.

Besides initial training workshops, follow-up sessions on reporting and the advanced curriculum and methods workshops, consultants provide ongoing assistance to teachers on site. To encourage administrative support, CCC offers leadership training for principals and superintendents to explain program goal setting, staff development, implementation, evaluation and class scheduling.

Implementation:

In building an implementation plan, the school is encouraged to set appropriate benchmarks for student performance and manage progress towards those benchmarks. In some instances, course benchmarks can be used to prepare students for state or national assessments. Professional development is considered by the developer to be key to effective implementation. There has to be sufficient release time for teachers to take advantage of the training and learn from one another, since the software is designed to interface with different instructional styles and instructors need to develop materials to support computerized lessons.

The developer has found that implementation has been hindered in places where one or more conditions exist:
Insufficient administrative understanding and support
Teachers not being brought early enough into the decision-making process for adopting the model
A lack of readiness of the computer equipment or electrical work needed to support a network
Teacher fear of technology and/or lack of basic computer skills among staff.

Costs:

Program costs vary, depending on the software purchased and range of grade levels to be covered. Costs also vary depending on the size of the program and the amount of professional development services requested. For example, the cost per student in a typical elementary school that has classroom computers can range from $362 to $602 per student (with a K-8 range of instruction) for a three-year program. Prorated, the cost per year per student ranges from $121 to $201. Computer costs are NOT included in these figures, but program materials such as teachers' handbooks and activities guides are included. Volume discounts and financing at reasonable rates are also available.

Considerations:

SuccessMaker requires a considerable investment of time and money for successful implementation. Additional resources are required for maintaining computer equipment and providing staff development. While only four days of staff development are required, the 10 days of staff development highly recommended by the developer may be more than some districts can accommodate.

Initial evaluation results are highly encouraging, but not conclusive. The largest evaluation study to date has been conducted in the United Kingdom with generally positive results; however, differences in the school systems between the United States and the U.K. do not necessarily make all of the results applicable to this country. Several credible independent studies have shown the utility of the model, but so far, few studies have been published in the professional literature.

Because this program is technology-based and consultants can do much of the follow-up support by phone and e-mail, SuccessMaker can be easily adapted for use in rural areas as well as more urban ones. Schools employing this model can expect to receive strong technical assistance and training support from the developer's four regional offices.

Contact Information:
For more information, contact:
Computer Curriculum Corporation
1287 Lawrence Station Road
Sunnyvale, CA 94089
408-745-6270
http://www.ccclearn.com

Policy Issues and Questions:
How can states help districts and schools choose the most appropriate programs to improve students' skills and performance? What information and assistance would be useful?
Should states promote particular programs for districts and schools to use?

How can policymakers check and validate a program's track record before they encourage districts to implement the program?
What criteria should states and districts use to invest in various programs initially and for the long term?
How should policymakers weigh benefits of a program versus its costs and required resources? Can a balance be struck between effectiveness and efficiency?
How can a state encourage public participation/community interaction in schools and individual programs?
What state policies can help to improve teacher training and professional development so teachers are better equipped to help students learn more effectively?

Resources:

Brush, Thomas (1998). An Evaluation of the Effectiveness of the Computer Curriculum Corporation's (CCC) Foundations and Exploreware Software on Students in Grades One through Five. L'Anse, MI: L'Anse Creuse Public Schools.

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